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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on changes in school management, evaluation, and monitoring in Czech education. The major aim of the first reform wave involved removing the most evident dysfunctions of the earlier, closed and uniform educational system and transforming it into an open, pluralistic one. Subsequent reforms focused on enhancing the quality of results achieved, such as balancing and stabilizing the educational system, concentrating on quality and how to evaluate it, and creating clear rules without undermining initiative and creativity. Schools have been given greater autonomy. Challenges needing to be addressed include balancing power shared between state and schools and between schools and headteachers, redefining the role of the Ministry of Education, and creating structures and policies whereby the entities within the educational system can perform self-evaluation, improve systemic consistency and competency, and allow for professional development. The Czech Republic has become involved in several international organizations to obtain resources for practical educational reform. Implementation of many reform projects, however, has been slow, and degrees of success vary. Czech education will need to undergo another series of fundamental changes soon. The White Book, currently in draft, will address upcoming issues in school management, evaluation, and monitoring. (Contains 23 references.) (RT)

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Getting closer to school effectiveness and school improvement in the Czech Republic: Major developments and topics for the future

Paper presented at the 14th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement. Toronto, 5-9 January 2001.

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The paper is focused on the development of Czech education after 1989, in relation to the efforts of school effectiveness and school improvement. The writer points out the main changes in Czech education in the past decade and, particularly, pays attention to the efforts in school management, evaluation, and monitoring. Main developments are analysed and their links to school effectiveness and improvement are indicated. Finally, the present situation and actual needs are linked to some key suggestions for the future, as they are being introduced in the latest fundamental document (second draft of the White Book on Czech education).

The paper is based on the results of some research projects the writer was involved in during the last seven years (especially those focused on the school governance system, internal school development efforts, or school-family relations in the Czech Republic) but also on the analysis of several other projects, of the current legislation, and of various relevant documents.

On the management of schools (and schooling)

Czech education has undergone many significant changes in all vital areas of its functioning after 1989, this text focusing especially on those in school management, evaluation, and monitoring. There is a close link between these changes and the issues of school effectiveness and improvement.

The first points of change

The change process in Czech education has had varied dynamics and aims during the 1990s. The major and highly ambitious aim of the very first reform wave seemed to be the removal of the most evident deformations and the transformation of a closed and uniform system into an open and pluralistic one. Main systemic changes of this period (early 1990s) gave way to strong and spontaneous development of bottom-up initiatives of schools, associations and other local bodies. Expansion of the quantity, structure and variety of educational opportunities could be seen, especially in the secondary vocational education. Many schools became thus important centres of creative activity and bearers of positive changes. Generally speaking, the education supply was therefore able to meet the education demand. On the other hand, these processes had some negative consequences, such as increasing costs and certain unevenness of the development of individual sectors of the education system. The centralized system, based on the prescription of the inputs, was partly removed and transformed. A complex and consistent mechanism, with features of more decentralized and participative system, was not fully completed, though. Such a mechanism should predominantly be based on indirect instruments of management.

The need for stabilization, quality, and clear rules

Consequently, one of the main aims of the following waves of reform efforts (after 1994, practically up to now) was to add more quality to the already achieved results. The main targets were formulated as follows: to balance and stabilize the education system; to concentrate on quality and its evaluation; to create clear rules, not tying down initiative and creativity (Kvalita, 1994; Otevřenost, 1994). It was believed that schools needed to be open, in order to be able to better react on new social problems. It was found necessary, and still is, to balance the proportion between the role of the state and the school autonomy. The role of the state remained decisive in some areas — especially to ensure fairness and effectiveness and to achieve the necessary quality. Also, larger autonomy of schools led to larger differences in their behavior. It seemed necessary to complement measures supporting positive and creative activities, with certain barriers to possible negative activities (Kalous, 1996).

New division of competencies

It was necessary to complete the new division of competencies among individual subjects and levels of management and governance, to balance vertical relations (among individual levels of management and governance — central, regional and local) and horizontal relations (among state governance, elected bodies of self-governance, and social partners), and to create a comprehensive system of indirect management instruments — financing, curriculum policy, evaluation and quality assurance, support to teachers and schools, etc.

In the vertical direction, competencies were largely transferred to District educational authorities and mainly to school headteachers. Later on, in 2000, District educational authorities were ceased and their competencies transferred to regional and local bodies. However, the extent of autonomy, rights and responsibilities of schools still remains to be clearly set. Moreover, it seems absolutely necessary to deduce certain consequences from the increased extent of responsibilities of schools, to ensure an adequate support to the work of schools.

On the horizontal level, there was a highly challenging task of setting up consultative bodies, to ensure broad participation of all involved and clearly define their functions. The tradition of these bodies had been broken (Hendrichová et al, 1998; Malach, 1998; Zpráva 1996; 1999).

The role of the Ministry has been changing but remains important. Instead of direct operational management, the Ministry is especially expected to deal with strategic management, creation of general conditions, support of innovations, and quality assurance. Of course, these tasks have to be understood in a broad context.

As mentioned above, regional administration bodies began to operate in the Czech Republic on 1 January 2001. They were given quite many competencies, especially in relation to secondary education. It seems that some adequate design of horizontal relations on the regional level has much to do with the origin of these bodies. Such a design will probably depend very much on the responsibilities and financial resources a regional body will have. It will be highly important for schools to see whether the members of regional bodies consider education a priority among the many sectors they govern. The entirely new situation is still full of uncertainties and — not seldom — doubts.

Headteachers

Quite a large transfer of power to school headteachers was one of the most important features of the development after 1990 (Nezvalová, 1999; Pol; 1997; Švecová, 1994). This development was not equal in all fields, however: in the framework of valid regulations, headteachers are responsible for the employment of a certain amount of financial resources, they see to personnel management, and they can control, rather independently, quite a large

part of the curriculum. On the other hand, their responsibility for the strategy of future developments of the school is not quite clear, nor for the quality of education the school provides, nor for the realization of regional education programs. Their responsibility to the public (parents and employers) is not clearly defined, either. The use of external evaluation and self-evaluation is still limited. Within the school there is little equilibrium between the powers of the headteacher, as a representative of state administration, and those of the school governing body. The latter is a self-governing body, meant to maintain the participation of teachers, parents, municipality representatives, and businesses. First efforts to implement school governing bodies were witnessed in 1993. Unfortunately, they have not been much of a success, operating today at some 4-5 % of schools (Pol, Rabušicová, 1996; 1998; 1999).

Some preconditions of success

It is largely believed that a school should be able to meaningfully employ the space obtained through the autonomy. However, the fundamental precondition thereof is a good link among the professional and salary promotion, and the pre- and in-service teacher education and training. Also, the personal development of a teacher must be connected to the development of the school. Teachers are to focus on quality improvement and on the evolution of innovations.

This has not been the case, except for some efforts, such as the *Učitel* (Teacher) program, announced in 1996 but never materialized. At the same time, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive and coordinated system of school support. Such a system should make use of the existing infrastructure of regional schooling and of the capacity of higher schools in the region. This condition has not been met either. Another issue, a highly topical and challenging one, is the systematic development of in-service education and training of headteachers, inspectors, and other educational administration personnel (Kohnová, 1999; Švecová, Svoboda, 1991).

At the moment it seems important to define the extent of school autonomy in various fields (education, organization, personnel, economy, external relations of the school). This also includes the equilibrium of powers and responsibilities between headteachers and their partners. To establish a school governing body at every school seems to be of the same importance (Koncepcie, 1999).

Also, it seems urgent to clarify the competencies of regional administrative structures, in order to let the social partners collaborate and push forward the execution of control through elected bodies. On the national scale, the influence of state administration and other partners has to be balanced (the National Board for Education has therefore been established). (SVP, 1999).

Evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance

Main achievements

The 1990s have brought certain progress of evaluation in Czech education. The necessity to balance the existing autonomy and a systematic evaluation of educational results was recognized — in order to assure the quality and effectiveness of schools. It was also discovered that in order to make comparisons with other countries it is necessary to make evaluations on the level of the educational system.

Step by step, the Czech Republic got involved in the activities of several international organizations, such as the OECD (especially through the participation in the system of annually published data, in the research of functional literacy of adults, in a new program of

periodical assessment of 15-year-olds in reading, maths and sciences, and more), the IEA (replication of a reading skills research, a survey of results in mathematics, sciences and civic education), and alike institutions.

The role of the school inspection has gradually been enlarged — starting from checking-up the fulfilment of regulations, up to the monitoring and evaluation of the educational process and its results. Close attention was paid to nation-wide surveys (such as that of the quality of secondary school leaving examinations), to the comparison of state and private grammar school results, and to the introduction of thematic inspections. The recognition of the right of choosing one's education path and the development of competitive environment resulted in the necessity to inform parents and students about the quality of the offered education and to regularly publish some data about the activities of secondary schools. Schools and the Ministry are supposed to annually publish the Annual Reports about their activities. Didactic tests, meant to gradually replace entrance examinations, were prepared and commercially distributed. Also, these tests became starting points of the *Maturant* and *Kalibro* surveys (measuring the skills of secondary school leavers and the ability to apply them). Tools for an external (comparable) part of secondary school leaving exams started to be contemplated. The evaluation model of higher vocational colleges, linked with their certification, was realized. Accreditation Committee gradually evaluates all Faculties of higher education institutions (SVP, 1999).

What needs to be done

Thus, a good number of particular evaluation activities have appeared. Some of them have been successful, some not. A comprehensive system of evaluation — based on a clear concept of educational policy, on an elaborated national curriculum, and on a clear definition of educational aims — has not been developed, though. We still have not learned to take deductions from evaluation conclusions in order for education quality to improve — within the educational system, in a school, or in a class. The question about the role of the school inspection still has not been answered: shall the inspectors control, evaluate, or carry out the process of quality improvement in school education? The role of various evaluation instruments has not been clarified, nor these instruments developed. The importance of self-evaluation for the development of a school has not been stressed sufficiently. The system of professional growth is not related to teacher's performance. The process of transition towards the identification of outputs (final examinations at basic schools, secondary school leaving examinations) has started only recently.

It seems therefore necessary to create a more varied and differentiated evaluation milieu, offering space for external evaluation. This milieu should also create space for the self-evaluation of schools. Nevertheless, the development of some evaluation standards and instruments, and their testing, is a demanding and long-lasting task. It needs time, resources, and specialists. The importance of these issues must also be seen from the viewpoint of the Czech participation in international comparisons and of a systemic use of evaluation results, to possibly correct the educational and curriculum policies (České, 1999).

What can we expect for the future?

Czech education and society seem to face the need to soon undergo another series of fundamental changes. Some have already started, more might follow. While the main motives of some of these changes are rooted in the system, other changes can rather be seen in relation to the efforts of the Czech Republic to join the EU and meet the European standards in education. The latest document dealing with the future development of Czech education

outlines the main directions with regard to both Czech and European incentives: the *White Book*, currently in its 2nd draft (Národní, 2000). It has not been completed yet and the draft is a subject of a number of public discussions. What does the *White Book* mean for the management of schools, evaluation, and monitoring?

First of all, it points out the importance of a new division of specific levels. "The task of the state is especially to define the 'rules of the game' (to set strategic aims and general directions of the development and to describe the participants' competencies), to create appropriate conditions (especially financial), to set up the main mechanisms of indirect management (curriculum policy, evaluation, financing, school and teacher's support), and to put permanent pressure on common goals (using indirect instruments, such as innovative financing or a career and salary system). The responsibility of self-governing levels (in Regions or Municipalities) is to enforce justifiable local interests and see to the set up, efficiency and maintenance of the network of schools. The task of the school, as the lowest level of the system, is to materialize professionally its own educational aims, within the limits of legally outlined rules, reasonably adapted to local conditions. On each of these levels, the cooperation of state administration and self-governance is required, as well as the participation of all those involved, including social partners." (Národní, 2000:36)

In the management of schools, their autonomy, and inner transition it is especially recommended:

- ***to develop a comprehensive system of instruments for the materialization of school autonomy***
 - to work out the methodics of planning and development of long-term projects, self-evaluation, educational programs, and Annual Reports
 - to bring on relevant in-service education programs for headteachers, teachers, and other staff
- ***to set up the School Development Program***
 - to establish the mechanism of innovative school financing and start the School Development Program
 - to work out the principles of differentiated approach to schools, according to their efforts and intentions
 - to employ and disseminate the experience of excellent schools
 - to develop networks of cooperating schools
- ***to build up a common supporting infrastructure***
 - to employ the newly built network of regional Pedagogical Centers so that they can organize in-service teacher training, coordinate consultative, methodical, and information activities, spread the Ministry's innovation programs, and spread the experience of schools
 - to carry on innovative financing and realize the School Development Program, through Pedagogical Centers
 - to train the educational staff so that they are able to fulfill new tasks related to curricula, evaluation, project work, and alike items of school autonomy, through Pedagogical Centers
 - to make a link among the activities of Pedagogical Centers, the school inspection, and regional self-governance, so that a basis for regional cooperation can be created
 - to start close cooperation with local higher education institutions and employ their capacities (Národní, 2000: 44-45)

In evaluation and monitoring it is especially recommended:

- **to complete the system of evaluation and monitoring** so that it covers all levels of the school, of the region, and of the educational system
 - to allow evaluation in any type and degree of schools
 - to link the system of evaluation and monitoring with international comparisons of educational results, and to make sure that the Czech Republic is permanently involved
 - to complete the system of information for decision-making of all participants of the process — pupils, parents, employers, schools, and state administration
 - to create the system of standards, criteria, and indicators
 - to use both internal and external forms of evaluation, extending the use of existing instruments of external evaluation and creating new ones
 - to connect evaluation through schools and school “users” with the preparation of Annual Reports and of Long-Term Intentions of School Development, and to make common use of it as a starting point for evaluation through school inspection
 - to establish a central Research and Development Unit
- **to create the system of final evaluation of pupils** at the end of every degree of the educational system, such a final evaluation being based on the diagnosis of pupils' capabilities and the results they achieve
- to extend the existing system of pedagogical and psychological counseling
- to widen the diagnostic competencies of teachers
- to gradually introduce the position of in-school psychologists (Národní, 2000:41-42)

Comments and disagreements about various issues of the 2nd draft of the *White Book* are well possible, yet it seems that, basically, the document meets the requirements of the system and its development. It is quite evident that it will take some time to materialize many of its recommendations. What is highly important, though, is that the Czech education is going to have an explicitly formulated agenda for the oncoming period. This agenda has now been offered to public discussion, and the fulfillment of this agenda would increase the efficiency of Czech schools and their ability to improve.

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